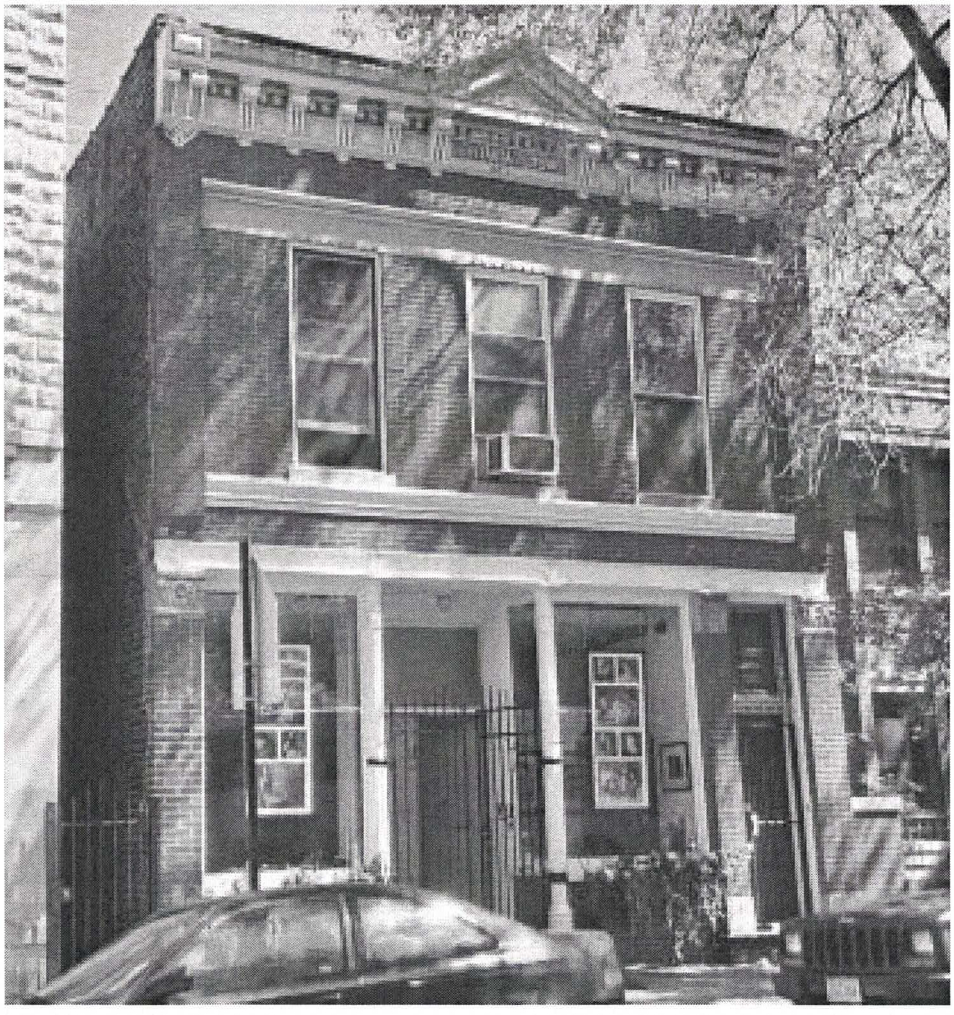
LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Richard Nickel Studio

1810 W. Cortland Street

Final Landmark recommendation adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, April 1, 2010.

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning
Patricia A. Scudiero, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose ten members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.

Richard Nickel Studio
1810 W. Cortland Street

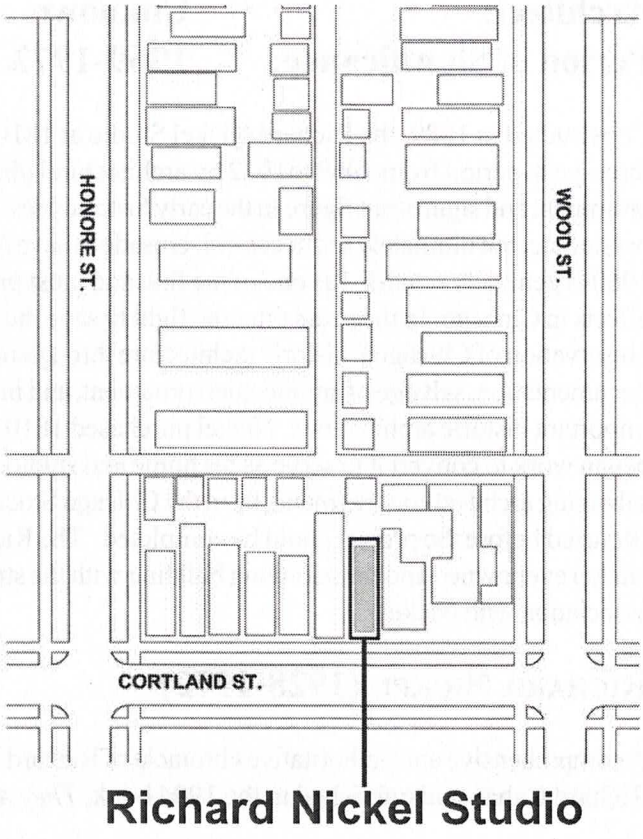
Built: **1889**
Architect: **Unknown**
Period of Significance: **1969-1972**

Constructed in 1889, the Richard Nickel Studio at 1810 W. Cortland St. was owned for a three-year-period from 1969 to1972 by architectural photographer Richard Nickel, a prominent and significant figure in the early historic preservation movement in Chicago. Nickel's passionate, but ultimately unsuccessful, crusade to save Adler & Sullivan's Garrick Theater in 1960 is generally regarded as one of the first and most prominent grass-roots preservation efforts in Chicago. In the years after the fight to save the Garrick, Nickel continued to work for preservation of Chicago's historic architecture through research, advocacy, photographic documentation, salvage of architectural ornament, and in raising public awareness of the city's important historic architecture. Nickel purchased 1810 W. Cortland in February 1969 and began work to convert it to serve as his home and studio. His untimely and tragic death while salvaging architectural fragments from the Chicago Stock Exchange in April 1972, however, occurred before the project could be completed. The Richard Nickel Studio is the only building Nickel ever owned and the surviving building with the strongest personal connection and association with Nickel.[1]

Richard Nickel (1928-1972)

A comprehensive and authoritative chronicle of Richard Nickel's life has been written by Richard Cahan and published in the 1994 book, *They All Fall Down: Richard Nickel's*

The Richard Nickel Studio is located at 1810 W. Cortland Street in the Bucktown neighborhood. The two-story store and flat building was built in 1889; Nickel purchased it in 1969, three years before his death in 1972.



Struggle to Save America's Architecture. Though Nickel has become popularly known as an early preservation advocate, as well as a tragic figure due to the circumstances of his death, Cahan's biography presents a broad picture of Nickel's life and accomplishments. The brief biography presented here owes much to Cahan's earlier work.

Nickel was born in 1928 into a middle-class Chicago family with a strong Polish ethnic identity. His father was an avid photographer, and Nickel took up the hobby as a boy. For most of his childhood, his family resided in the Humboldt Park and Logan Square neighborhoods, and Nickel later claimed that his decision to buy the building at 1810 W. Cortland was partly influenced by its location in an older, traditionally ethnic neighborhood like those of his boyhood.

Upon graduation from high school in 1946, Nickel enlisted in the Army and served a two-year stint in occupied Japan. He returned to Chicago in 1948 and enrolled in the photography degree program at the Institute of Design. Nickel's progress toward his degree was interrupted in 1951 when he was called up to active duty from the Army reserves and served briefly in the Korean War, where he was assigned to prepare photographic documentation of military bridges and engineering works.

Nickel resumed his studies at the Institute of Design in 1952 under the tutelage of Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind, nationally-prominent photographers. Both would become lifelong mentors to Nickel. A class by Siskind required students to identify and photograph buildings and architectural ornament of Dankmar Adler and Louis Henri Sullivan. This project sparked Nickel's lifelong obsession with historic architecture in general, and the work of Adler & Sullivan in particular. In 1954 Siskind and Nickel mounted an exhibit of student photographs from the "Adler & Sullivan project" at the Institute of Design which received favorable press coverage. This was the first photographic exhibition of Adler & Sullivan's architecture, a subject that at the time had received scant attention from academics as well as the public.[2]

After receiving his undergraduate degree, Nickel continued with graduate studies in photography at the Institute of Design which by this time had merged with the Illinois Institute of Technology. The merger allowed Nickel to take courses in architectural history, providing an academic foundation that balanced his aesthetic appreciation of historic architecture as a photographer. His graduate thesis focused on the documentation of lesser-known works of Adler & Sullivan.

Nickel earned his Master's degree in 1957 and began working on his own as an architectural photographer. In addition, he worked with Siskind to publish a complete catalogue of Adler & Sullivan's architecture. *The Complete Architecture of Adler & Sullivan* was to be an exhaustive and comprehensive study that would combine photography as well as scholarship to reclaim Adler & Sullivan's important contributions to architecture. The project would occupy Nickel in fits and starts throughout his life. He struggled to support himself financially over the next decade as an architectural photographer, though he was often diverted to take part in preservation advocacy and salvage efforts. The creation of a studio to support his writing and professional photography practice was one of Nickel's goals in acquiring the building at 1810 W. Cortland.

The Fight to Save the Garrick Theater

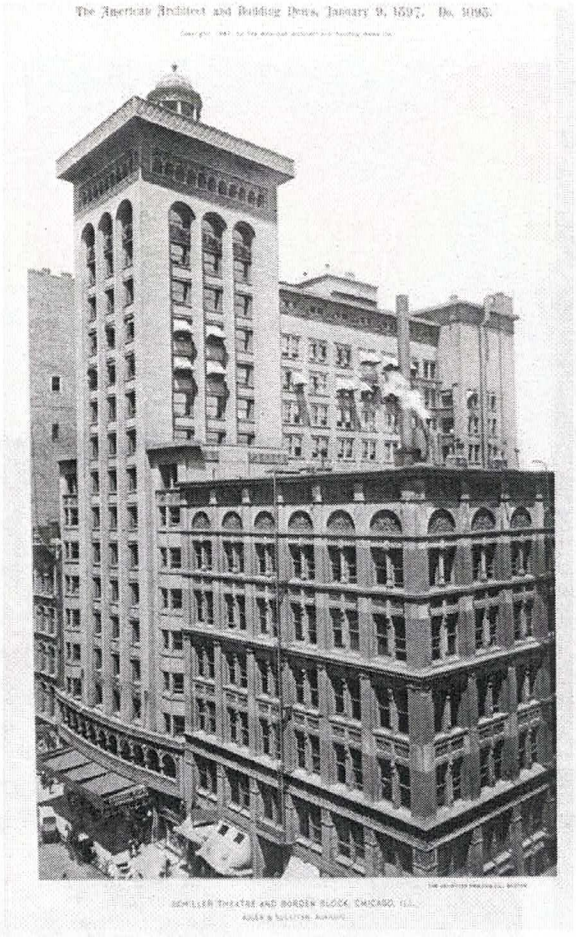
Completed in 1892, the Garrick Theater (originally named the Schiller Building), located at 64 W. Randolph, was designed by Adler & Sullivan, and is regarded as one of the firm's most important works. The 17-story office building included a 1,200-seat theater renowned for its acoustical qualities. Both the building's exterior and the theater interior featured elaborate architectural ornament that was the signature of Sullivan's work.

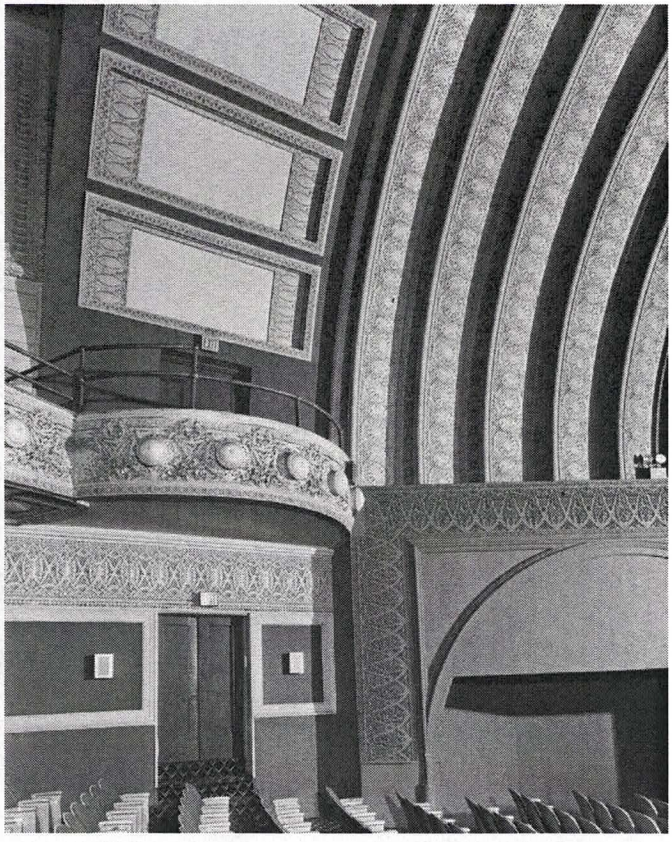
In the 1930s the Garrick began a long period of decline and disinvestment, and in 1950 it was purchased by the Balaban and Katz Theater Corporation which operated the Garrick as a cinema. Citing the building's obsolescence and lack of profitability, Balaban and Katz announced in January 1960 plans to demolish the Garrick and replace it with a parking structure—reflecting a larger trend in Chicago's Loop that began in the 1950s and resulted in the demolition of many of city's pioneering early office buildings for the construction of modern, larger office towers, parking garages, and other structures.

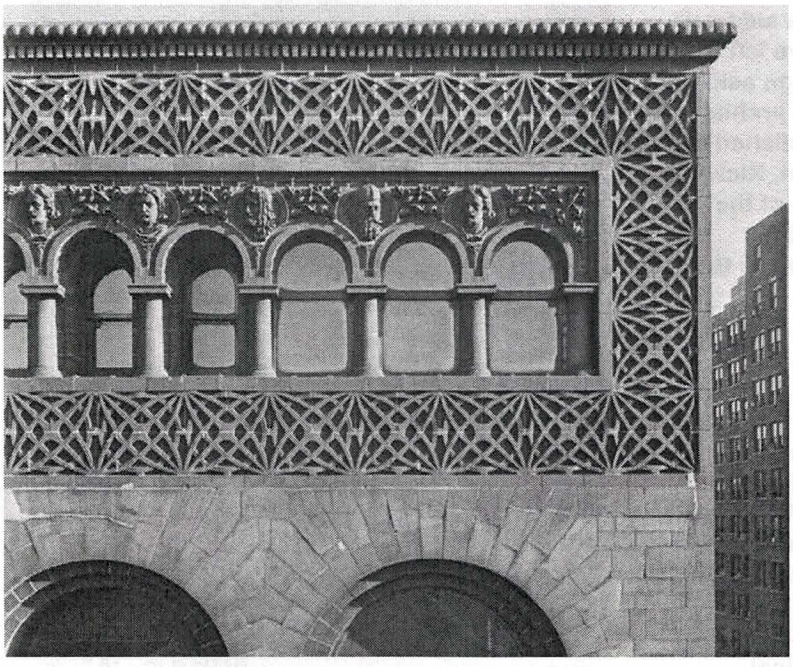
The architectural significance of the Garrick Theater was not unrecognized; at the same time of Balaban and Katz's announcement in 1960, the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, the precursor to the current Commission, identified the Garrick as one of 39 buildings for landmark designation.[3] The first Commission was established under a preservation ordinance adopted in 1957, and the Commission was authorized, among other things, to designate certain buildings as "Architectural Landmarks." In addition to the Garrick Theater, the list of 39 landmark buildings included such iconic works as the Auditorium Building, Carson, Pirie, Scott and Co., the Monadnock, Reliance, and Fisher Buildings, the Rookery, and the Robie House. Significantly, the designation of these buildings was merely honorary—the 1957 ordinance did not give the Commission the authority to prevent owners from demolishing landmark buildings.

Nickel had previously photographed the Garrick Theater for his book on Adler & Sullivan, and soon after the demolition plan was announced he set about to more completely document the building, including the interior of the theater. Nickel's work on the Adler & Sullivan catalog made him well aware of the ongoing loss of historic architecture in the city, but prior to the Garrick, Nickel had never tried to save a building. The history of the fight to save the Garrick suggests that without Nickel's involvement, the Garrick might have been demolished with little or no public discussion.

At the time of the completion of the photographic documentation of the Garrick, Nickel contacted Thomas Stauffer, a professor of political science at the City Colleges who played a prominent role in the creation of Chicago's first preservation ordinance in 1957. Together in 1960 they formed the Chicago Heritage Committee, an *ad hoc* organization of citizens dedicated to saving the Garrick Theater. It was the first such grass-roots organization of its kind in Chicago, and it remained active in general preservation efforts until 1968. Nickel remained involved in the organization throughout this time. Theodore Hild's history of the early preservation movement in Chicago notes that the Heritage Committee played an important role in educating the public about the importance of the city's architectural heritage and in building

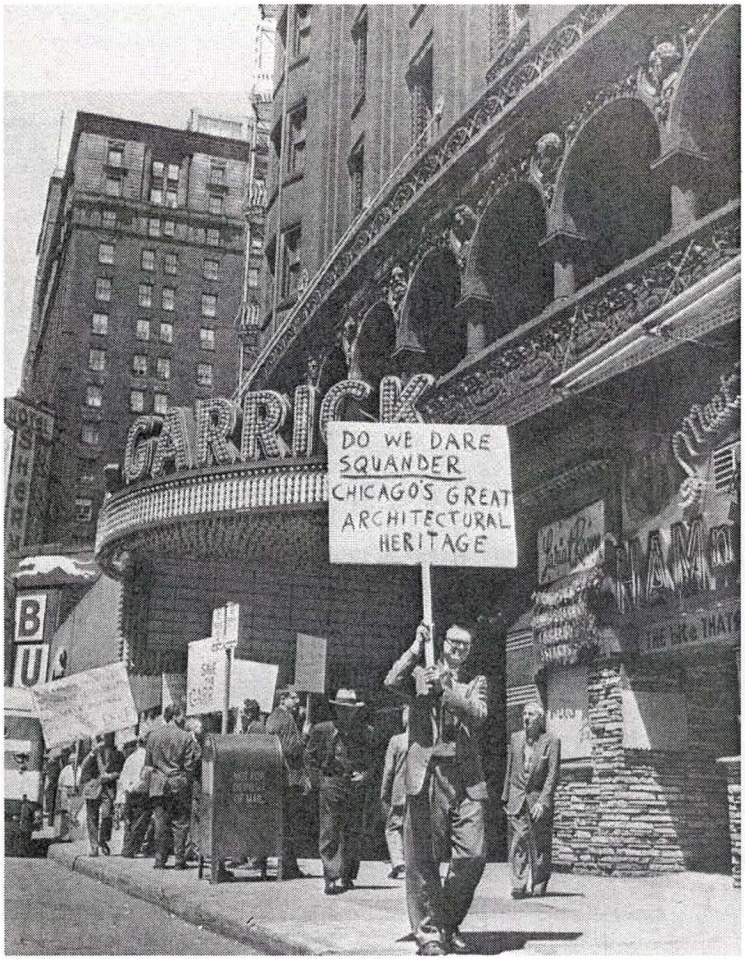






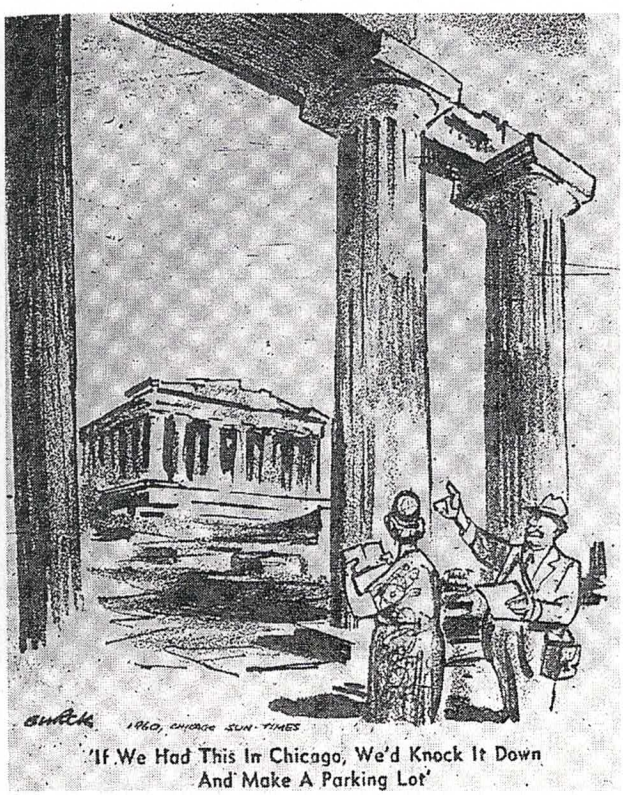
Above left: A photograph of the Garrick Theater (Adler & Sullivan, 1892, 64 W. Randolph) soon after its completion. Richard Nickel played a significant role in the effort to save the Garrick Theater in 1961, an important event in the early historic preservation movement in Chicago. The Garrick is the tall mid-block building behind the Borden Block, also by Adler & Sullivan from 1880. The Borden stood for only 36 years before being demolished in 1916 for the Woods Theater.

When plans were announced to demolish the Garrick in 1960, Richard Nickel set out to complete photographic documentation of the building. Nickel's photographs of the interior of the theater (above right) and a detail of the ornament on the building's top story (left) are archived with the Historic American Buildings Survey.



On June 8, 1960, Nickel organized a sidewalk protest in front of the Garrick. Above left is an image of Nickel brandishing a sign asking, "Dare we squander Chicago's great architectural heritage?" The photo was published in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Above right, Nickel is interviewed by a reporter in front of the Garrick. Nickel's protest succeeded in attracting media and public attention to the Garrick.

In a letter to the editor published in the *Chicago Tribune* on May 24, 1960, Nickel wondered: "In this day of mass tourist flights to the capitals of Europe where Americans continue to seek 'culture,' can we not open our eyes to our own treasures-and heed what is happening to them." Jacob Burck picked up on this theme in his political cartoon (right) published on June 23, 1960, in the *Chicago Sun-Times* referring to the plans to replace the Garrick with a parking garage.



'If We Had This In Chicago, We'd Knock It Down And Make A Parking Lot'

support for the passage of a stronger landmarks ordinance [the current ordinance, enacted in 1968].[4]

On behalf of the Chicago Heritage Committee, Nickel appealed in writing to the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks to prevent the demolition of the Garrick, which had been designated as a landmark. The Commission responded that it lacked the legal authority to prevent the demolition and that the case of the Garrick was further complicated by the building's unprofitability.

Failing to receive support from the Commission, Nickel and the Chicago Heritage Committee turned to grass-roots activism in the summer of 1960. On June 8, 1960, Nickel began a sidewalk protest in front of the Garrick. Perhaps one of the most familiar images of Nickel is that of him brandishing a picket sign at the protest asking, "Do we dare squander Chicago's great architectural heritage?" In 1969, Nickel recalled the experience:

> *We were a little resistance movement. Three or four of us decided that we can't let this happen and we decided to picket. Now this was a revolutionary thing back then, before lots of people began picketing for various things. That first morning, because the others were working, I said "O.K. I'll start it." And there I was alone and, my God, carrying this huge sign. And, talk about embarrassment, this Balaban and Katz attorney came along and he asked, "What the hell are you doing?" And I said I didn't want the building wrecked. By noon we had 15 people picketing and then the momentum built-up.*[5]

Dubbed by the press as the "egghead protest," the five-day demonstration, attended by preservationists and architects, succeeded in attracting media and public attention to the Garrick. Throughout the summer, Ruth Moore, a reporter with the *Chicago Sun-Times,* covered Nickel and the Chicago Heritage Committee's efforts. Nickel also wrote frequent letters to Chicago newspapers, and he enlisted the help of prominent figures in the field of architecture to support the cause, including architects Philip Johnson, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Jose Luis Sert, and Alfred Caldwell; former colleagues of Louis Sullivan, including William Gray Purcell, A. O. Budina and Alfonso Ianelli; and the historian, critic and urban theorist Lewis Mumford. The fight to save the Garrick Theater, and the tactics employed by Richard Nickel in bringing public attention and awareness to it, is credited as being the first broadly grass-roots preservation efforts in Chicago.[6]

In response to the growing publicity, Mayor Richard J. Daley called a public hearing, created a committee to explore the possibility of the City acquiring the building, and ordered Balaban and Katz's permit application to demolish the building to be withheld.[7] Nickel was called upon to lead a group of aldermen on a tour of the Garrick. While the city searched for a way to save the Garrick, Balaban and Katz sued the city to force it to issue the demolition permit. On August 23, Judge Donald S. McKinlay of the Cook County Superior Court ruled that the city was justified in withholding the permit if it deemed a building to have aesthetic value. Though

Once the battle to save the Garrick was lost, Nickel succeeded in raising $26,000 to fund the salvage of some of the building's ornament (right). The salvage work was done by Nickel and his friends, John Vinci and David Norris, with the cooperation of the demolition contractor. The men in the photo are workers employed by the contractor. Nickel was hired by the City of Chicago to catalog and distribute the fragments to museums and universities worldwide.

THE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT
OF THE GARRICK BUILDING
DESIGNED BY
LOUIS H. SULLIVAN
HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY THE EFFORT
Chicago Chapter, American Institute of A
Chicago Chapter, Society of Architectur
Commission of Chicago Architecture
WITH THE COOPERATION
BALABAN & KATZ CORP. ATLAS

As a photographer, Richard Nickel recorded important Chicago buildings which were later demolished, including the Cable Building (lower left, 1898-99, Holabird and Roche, 57 E. Jackson) and the Republic Building (lower right, 1905, 1909, Holabird and Roche, 209 S. State Street). Both buildings were demolished in 1961.

the ruling would be later overturned on appeal, the court's decision was a significant victory for Nickel and the Chicago Heritage Committee in their fight to save the Garrick. It received national press coverage, and articles in *Time* and *Harper's* magazines credited Richard Nickel as the main figure behind the fight to save the Garrick Theater.[8] Locally the fight to save the Garrick established Nickel's reputation as a leading activist for preservation in Chicago.

While the court decision was under appeal, Nickel encouraged the Chicago Heritage Committee to expand its focus to other buildings threatened with demolition including the Republic Building (1905, 1909, Holabird and Roche) at 209 S. State Street and the Cable (Hoops) Building (1898-99, Holabird and Roche, and a designated landmark under the 1957 ordinance) at 57 E. Jackson. Both buildings would be lost, but not before Nickel was granted access to complete photo-documentation of the buildings and, in the case of the Cable Building, to salvage ornament.

Winning its appeal, Balaban and Katz began mobilizing to demolish the Garrick in the winter of 1960-61. Though the battle to save the building was lost, Nickel shifted to a second public campaign to at least salvage some of its architectural ornament.[9] He convinced museums and universities to write to City Hall to request fragments from the Garrick, and he succeeded in raising $26,000 to fund the work.[10] From February to June 1961, Nickel with his friends architect John Vinci and architecture student David Norris were granted permission by the building owner to salvage interior and exterior ornament from the Garrick. Approximately 200 pieces in total were salvaged and stored at Navy Pier.[11] From 1961 to 1963, Nickel was hired by the City to create a catalogue of the ornament and arrange for its donation to museums and universities worldwide.[12]

During the fight to save the Garrick Theater, Nickel reveals himself in his writing as an idealist in a heroic struggle with the status quo. He found fault with the Landmarks Commission for its assertion that "economic circumstances" prevented the Garrick from being saved, and asked "is the dollar so almighty? If it is, will not the same excuse be offered until no landmarks remain?"[13] He later sharply criticized the owners of the Garrick as lacking in cultural appreciation and care for their property: "What it really boils down to is taste . . . . The guys who run these buildings have no taste, they do not know the difference between a doorway of mahogany and one of mahogany-finished formica."[14] And though he sought to raise awareness of Chicago's important architecture among the general public, he often despaired at the cultural norms of the period: "In this day of mass tourist flights to the capitals of Europe where Americans continue to seek 'culture,' can we not open our eyes to our own treasures and heed what is happening to them?"[15] Such assertiveness and uncompromising idealism remained part of Nickel's character throughout his involvement in Chicago's fledgling preservation movement.

Though the Garrick Theater was ultimately lost, Richard Nickel's efforts to save it were critical to the development of the modern historic preservation movement in Chicago. By advocating to save a large, downtown commercial building, Nickel pushed the historic preservation movement beyond its then normal boundaries of commemorating public buildings and sites associated with important people or historic events. Nickel's argument that the Garrick's aesthetic value alone

Above: Richard Nickel's photograph of the demolition of the proscenium and stage of the Garrick Theater in 1961.

Right: Richard Nickel's self-portrait taken in 1960 on the cornice of the Republic Building.

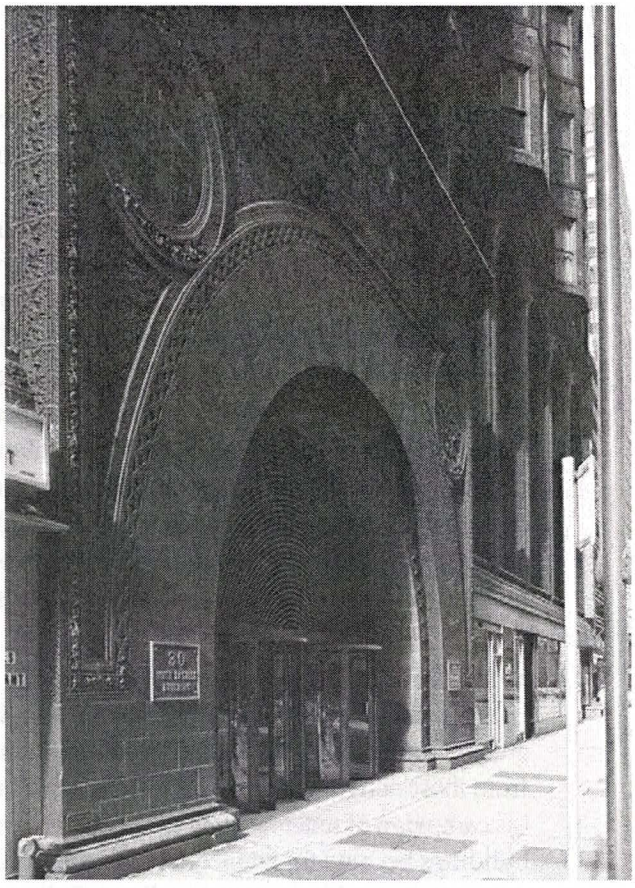
made it worthy of preservation, regardless of economic circumstances, represented a significant evolution in the historic preservation movement in Chicago.

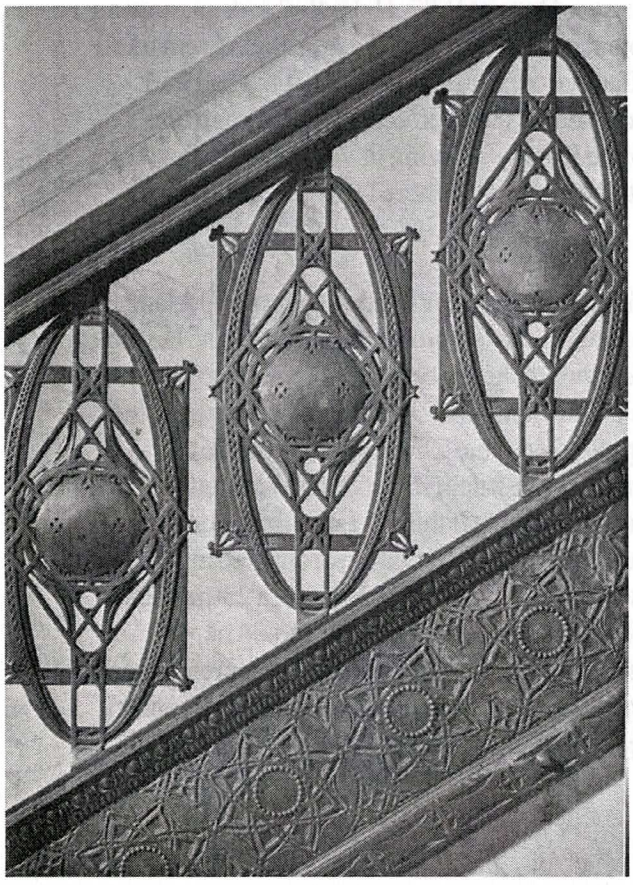
In addition to redefining what was worthy of preservation, Nickel's fight to save the Garrick was also innovative in its grass-roots methods which included public demonstrations, letter-writing and the use of the media. Rather than relying solely on a small group of academics and elites as was typical of earlier preservation efforts, Nickel sought a broad base of support from the general public by raising awareness of the city's important historic architecture. This in turn led to the city government's greater involvement in historic preservation. The loss of buildings such as the Garrick highlighted the ineffectiveness of Chicago's 1957 preservation ordinance and would lead to the passage of stronger preservation legislation with the enactment of the current landmarks ordinance in 1968. In addition to advocacy, Nickel used his skills as an architectural photographer and as a salvager of architectural ornament at the Garrick to raise public awareness and appreciation of the city's historic architecture.

1961 to 1970

In the years after the loss of the Garrick Theater, Richard Nickel continued to work as an architectural photographer and on his book on Adler & Sullivan, but was frequently diverted from these activities to join in efforts to save buildings. Throughout the 1960s, Nickel continued his campaign of letter-writing to Chicago newspapers and to City Hall as important historic buildings became threatened with demolition. He pressed the City to take action to save the Albert Sullivan House (1891, Adler & Sullivan, demolished 1970), the Meyer Building (1893, Adler & Sullivan, demolished 1968), and the Glessner House (1887, H. H. Richardson, now a house museum). In a 1969 interview, as he was planning to move to Chicago, Nickel remarked that he though his letter-writing would be more effective once he moved from suburban Park Ridge: "I get nervous when people who write to newspapers with criticisms of Chicago are knocked by guys like the *Daily News* columnist Mike Royko for living in Winnetka and having solutions to Chicago's problems. It will be good to be in the city where I can identify with city problems."[16]

As the preservation movement gained momentum in the city and nationally during this period, Nickel shared the stage with a growing number of architects and preservation activists. He took a lower profile in the Chicago Heritage Committee, though he encouraged its efforts to pass a stronger preservation ordinance. In 1966 he was on the board of a then-new organization, the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation (the precursor to the Chicago Architecture Foundation) which was formed to buy and renovate the Glessner House. Nickel abruptly resigned from the organization two years later , however, when it failed to support his call to save the Meyer Building. After the passage of the City's new preservation ordinance in 1968, Nickel was appointed by the landmarks commission to its Advisory Committee, a 23-member body which was tasked to identify for the Commission a list of buildings that should be prioritized for designation. Throughout the 1960s, Nickel also continued to salvage architectural fragments from Adler & Sullivan buildings that were slated for demolition or abandoned, and in 1965 he sold a large personal collection of fragments to Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.





Photographs of the Chicago Stock Exchange Building (1894, Adler & Sullivan, 30 North LaSalle Street) as it appeared in 1963 when it was documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (Cervin Robinson, photographer).

In 1969 Nickel purchased the store and flat building at 1810 W. Cortland in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood and gradually began working to convert it to his home and studio. The work was slow going, depending upon his available time and finances. In the years that he owned the building, Nickel continued to participate in preservation battles which consumed his time and detracted from his paid work as a photographer, a factor that certainly contributed to the slow progress of the renovation. Nickel did use the building as a base for his architectural salvage work to store tools and architectural fragments.[17] At the time of his death in 1972, in addition to several pieces from his personal collection, 1810 W. Cortland Street contained architectural ornament that he had salvaged from the Max M. Rothschild Building (1880, Adler & Sullivan, demolished 1972) at 210 W. Monroe St. and the Chicago Stock Exchange Building (1893, Adler & Sullivan, demolished 1972) at 30 N. LaSalle St. that he had obtained in the immediately preceeding months.

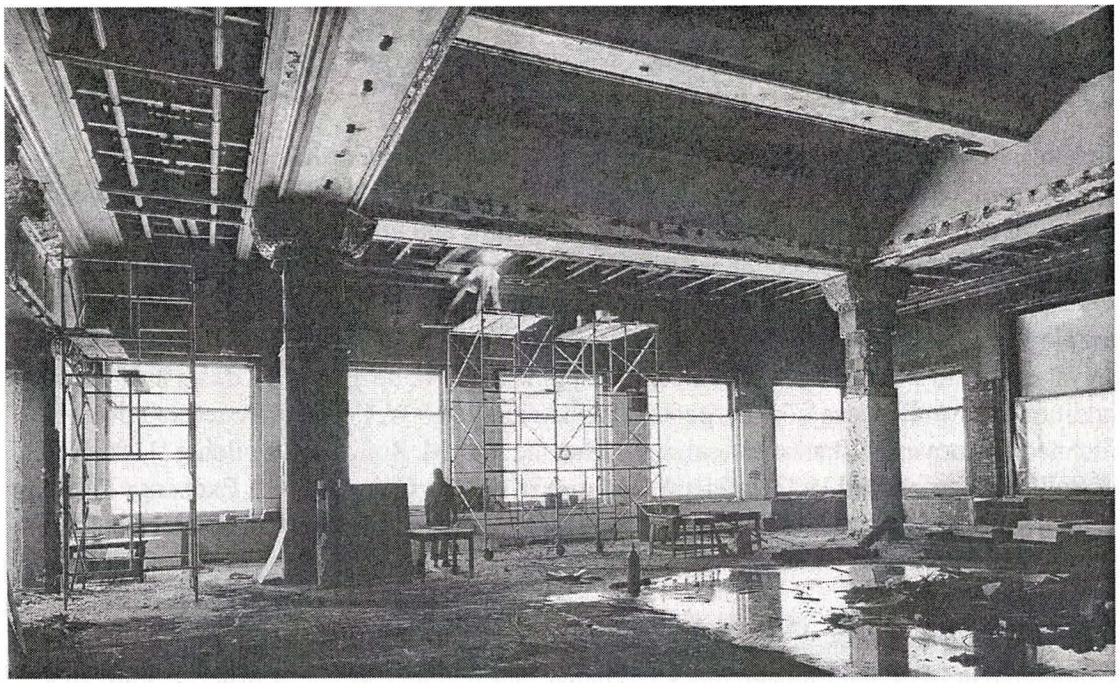
The Chicago Stock Exchange Building

Completed in 1894, the Chicago Stock Exchange was regarded as one of Adler & Sullivan's most important designs. It featured innovations in both its structure and foundations, but it was best known for its architectural design and ornamentation, particularly its massive and elaborately decorated arched entrance on LaSalle Street as well as the trading room and other interior spaces. Like the Garrick, it had been designated as a landmark in 1960 by the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, the precursor to the current commission. Nickel first became publicly involved with the building in 1964 when he argued against a lobby modernization that resulted in the removal of delicate, open metal elevator cages designed by Sullivan.

In 1970, the building was threatened with demolition for a large office tower. Nickel's biographer Richard Cahan states that a combination of exhaustion and cynicism prevented Nickel from taking a lead role in the fight to save it. A 1969 interview of Nickel in *Inland Architect* described him as "one of Chicago's guardians of old buildings," yet Nickel expressed some ambivalence and had begun to distance himself at that time from the preservation movement. He described building demolition sites as having "that smell, with the dust, the wet wood, the plaster, I sense it and I just walk the other way now. It makes me sick . . . . some day I think I'll just do portrait photography."[18] By the time of the Stock Exchange fight, Nickel was increasingly focused on his career as a professional photographer, and he was under growing pressure from his publisher to finish his book on Adler & Sullivan.

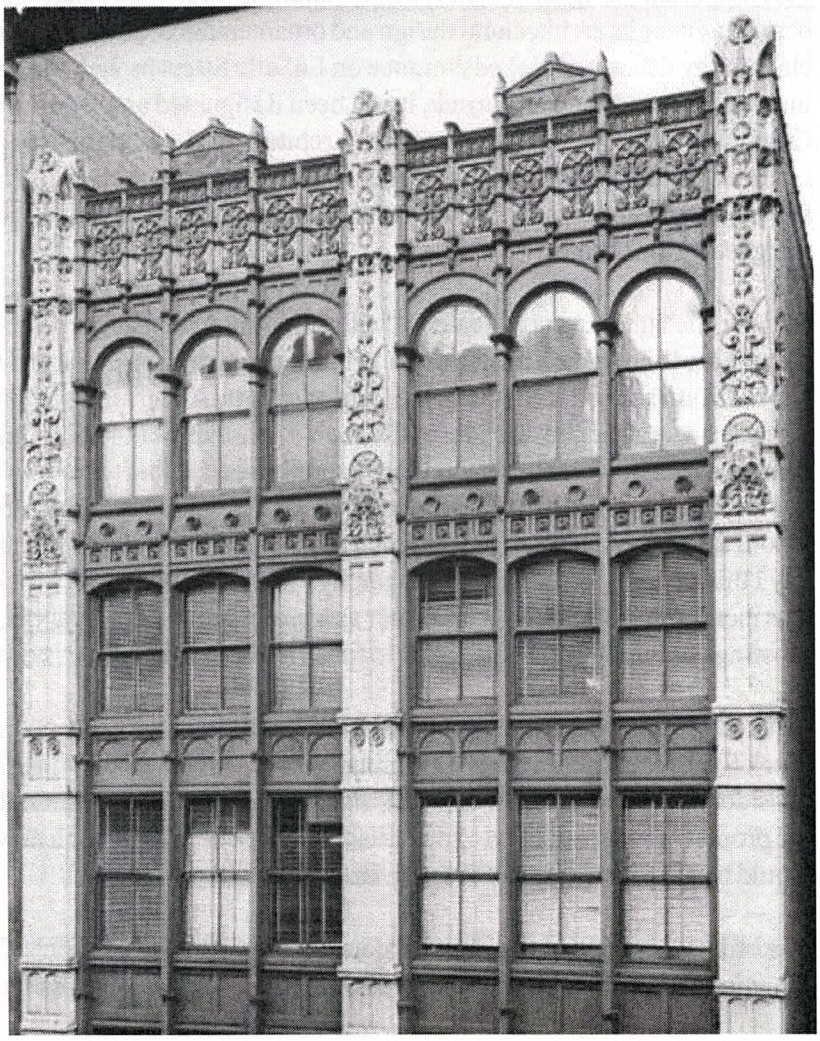
In March 1969, the then newly-established Commission on Chicago Landmarks included the Stock Exchange Building in its first group of seven buildings for which it had initiated the consideration process for landmark designation. In the following months it became known that the property owner intended to demolish the Stock Exchange for a new office building. This would be the first real test of the new landmarks ordinance.

The ordinance required the Commissioner of the City's Department of Development and Planning to issue a report on proposed designations, and Commissioner Lewis J. Hill's report



Nickel assisted John Vinci in salvaging the Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room interior (above) and the building's entrance arch which were reconstructed at the Art Institute of Chicago. While the building was being demolished, Nickel continued to return to the site, although without authorization, to salvage material, and was killed in a partial collapse of the unstable structure on April 13, 1972.

Right: The Max M. Rothschild Building (1880, Adler & Sullivan, at 210 W. Monroe St.). When the building was slated for demolition in 1972, Nickel salvaged the cast-iron ornamentation at the top of the building for the Art Institute of Chicago. Ornament from this building as well as from the Chicago Stock Exchange was stored in Nickel's building at 1810 W. Cortland.



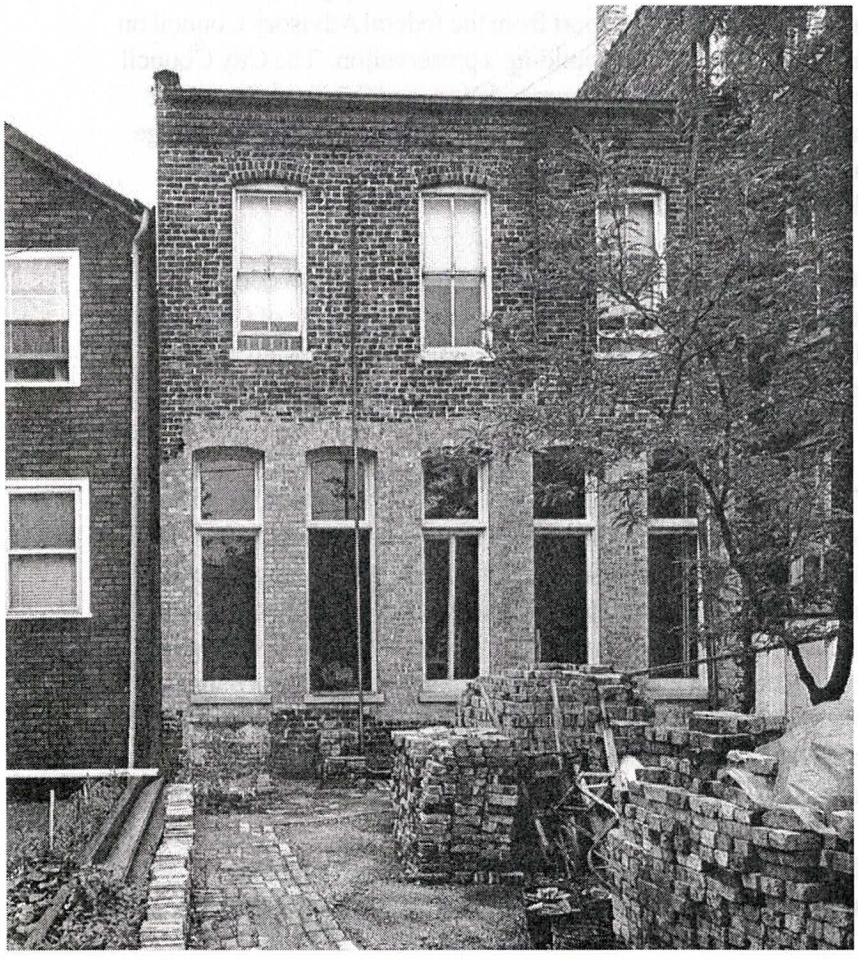
to the landmarks commission in July 1969 did not support the proposed designation of the Chicago Stock Exchange, stating that the building "fails to fulfill the dramatic need for new commercial development" which had been outlined at that time for the LaSalle Street corridor. The Commission continued forward with the proposal and held public hearings on the Stock Exchange on January 28 and February 11 and 16, 1970, which received national attention. Richard Nickel attended but did not speak at these hearings. On February 24, 1970, the Commission voted in favor of a final landmark recommendation to the City Council for the designation of the Stock Exchange.[19]

The City Council referred the matter to its Committee on Cultural and Economic Development, which in August 1970 voted against landmark designation of the Stock Exchange largely on the assumption that such designation would require the City itself to acquire and restore the building at great cost. In response, the Commission adopted a resolution to the City Council expressing "its hope that ways and means can be found to save buildings of historical and architectural merit, by the use of tax relief, zoning benefits, transfer of air rights and other methods."[20] Additional efforts from the newly-formed non-profit advocacy organization Landmarks Preservation Council (later Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, now Landmarks Illinois) and a special committee appointed by Mayor Richard J. Daley to explore options for saving the building delayed the demolition of the Stock Exchange for over a year. In an unprecedented move, the Commission re-transmitted their recommendation for landmarking the Stock Exchange to City Council in July 1971 with a new report from the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation bolstering the argument for the building's preservation. The City Council remained unswayed by the Commission's second recommendation, and the mayor's special committee failed to find a developer for the building's reuse. Ultimately, the Stock Exchange would be demolished in the spring of 1972 because the City Council would not affirm the Commission on Chicago Landmarks' recommendation.

In early 1972, before demolition began, Nickel was hired by the Commission to complete photo-documentation of the building. With the City's approval, the Art Institute of Chicago also hired architect John Vinci to supervise salvage of the Stock Exchange trading room and the building's entrance arch.[21] Vinci convinced Nickel to join in the salvage work, which was completed in February 1972.

Also during that winter of 1971-72, Nickel was salvaging the fifth-floor facade of the Max M. Rothschild Building (1880, Adler & Sullivan, demolished 1972) at 210 W. Monroe St., also slated for demolition. At the time, the Rothschild Building was the oldest-surviving Adler & Sullivan building and was significant for its cast-iron ornamentation at its top (fifth-floor) story. The Art Institute of Chicago had agreed to acquire the cast-iron elements at Nickel's urging. In the months immediately prior to his death, Nickel used his building at 1810 W. Cortland as a base for salvage operations. He kept his demolition tools and ladders there and brought back architectural fragments from both the Stock Exchange and Rothschild salvage efforts for storage and for photographic documentation..

Nickel continued to return to the Stock Exchange, unauthorized, to salvage additional architectural ornamentation as the demolition was underway, despite warnings by the demolition



In February 1969, Richard Nickel purchased the two-story bakery and flat building at 1810 W. Cortland Street with the intention of gradually converting the building into his home and studio. Above: photograph taken by Nickel after he purchased the building. Left: the rear elevation of the building showing the reconstructed lower half of the rear wall.

contractor that the building was unsafe. He went to the site on April 13, 1972, apparently to salvage a spandrel panel that Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville wanted to acquire and was killed by falling masonry in a partial collapse inside the unstable structure. Demolition work on the site was suspended, and his body was not located until weeks later.

After Nickel's tragic death, his role in bringing attention to Chicago's historic architecture was widely recognized. The City of Chicago declared May 13, 1972, as an official day of mourning for Nickel. Obituaries appeared in several architectural journals with national circulation. In June 1972, at a well-attended memorial service for Nickel at the Glessner House, his former teacher Alfred Caldwell described him as a "poet with a camera." His service to Chicago's historic architecture was also formally recognized by the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Chicago Association of Commerce in a posthumous award ceremony in September 1972. A year after his death, the Art Institute of Chicago mounted a retrospective exhibit of Nickel's photography, which at the time was the largest photo exhibit it had ever produced.

The circumstances of his tragic death have lent Nickel an almost mythic status in the city's preservation movement, as his reputation and importance have continued to grow with the publication of Cahan's biography, the display of architectural ornament he salvaged, and as many of his photographs have become iconic images of the city's historic architecture.

The Richard Nickel Studio at 1810 W. Cortland Street

After years of searching for a property in Chicago, in February 1969 Richard Nickel purchased a two-story brick store and flat building at 1810 W. Cortland Street for $7,500. Located in the Bucktown neighborhood of the Logan Square community area, the street elevation retains a high degree of historic integrity both in terms of its original appearance and its appearance during Nickel's three-year association with the building (1969-1972). The street-level storefront features a central recessed entrance flanked by cast-iron columns and large display windows. A second entrance door to the right of the storefront leads to what was a second-floor apartment. Above the storefront, the front elevation is clad in pressed brick with punched window openings topped with a carved limestone bandcourse. The side elevations are clad in common brick and are mostly obscured by neighboring buildings. A handsome pressed-metal cornice is embossed with the name "Grimm's Bldg," the name of the baker that built the building in 1889. (There is a virtual twin of the building, also built by Grimm, six doors to the west on Cortland Street.)

The Richard Nickel Studio was the only building Nickel ever owned. His letters to friends reveal that he was very proud of the building and that he had definite plans to convert it to his home and studio. For Nickel, the studio held promise as a place where he would be able to finish his book on Adler & Sullivan, and as a place for a darkroom to support his career as a professional photographer. As a home, the building would offer Nickel independence from continuing to live with his parents in suburban Park Ridge (where he had a room in the attic and his photography studio in the basement) and a return to an older Chicago neighborhood, such as

those in which he grew up. Nickel also became engaged to be married in March 1972, a personal milestone that spurred his desire to finish work on the building.

After experiencing so many losses, Nickel was also drawn to 1810 W. Cortland Street as an historic building that he could "save." Despite its humble character in comparison to the buildings he tried to save from demolition, the preservation of this building would be in his control; he dubbed it his "Polish Palazzo."

From February 1969 up until his death in April 1972, Nickel gradually worked on the renovation of the building as his finances and time permitted. Nickel's biographer Richard Cahan states that Nickel did a portion of the labor himself, including removing some interior walls and dismantling a brick oven enclosure at the rear (north) elevation. Nickel's continued involvement in preservation battles during the years that he owned the Cortland building diverted him away from paid work as a photographer, a factor that surely slowed his progress on the building's renovation.

Nickel's correspondence and photographs indicate that he made no changes to the front or side elevations of the building's exterior. The removal of the oven enclosure attached to the rear of the building necessitated rebuilding of the lower half of the rear common-brick elevation. The new rear wall, designed by Nickel's friend, architect John Vinci, included five narrow, tall arched window openings. Common brick salvaged from the oven enclosure was used for the construction, and the masonry construction was done by Vinci's brothers who were masonry contractors.[22]

In the months before his death, Nickel used 1810 W. Cortland Street as a base for his salvage work. Architectural and cultural historian Tim Samuelson befriended the older Nickel as a teen, and Samuelson accompanied Nickel in salvaging ornament from Adler & Sullivan buildings slated for demolition. Samuelson stated that 1810 W. Cortland Street was "our home base, if he [Nickel] wanted to salvage ornament, I would meet him in the morning at the building, he had his tools and ladders there." Nickel and Samuelson brought architectural fragments they had salvaged back to 1810 W. Cortland Street for photo-documentation and storage, including ornament from the Stock Exchange and Rothschild buildings in the winter months of 1971. Samuelson also noted that Nickel kept a large personal collection of fragments at 1810 W. Cortland Street:

> *He was also bringing things from home* [his parents' home in Park Ridge] *in anticipation of moving there. He took a lot of the pieces he liked best. So as far as ornament that was in the building, sitting in the hallway table were stacks of ornament, including pieces he had salvaged from the Garrick Theater, some early pieces by John Edelmann, Louis Sullivan's early mentor, from a old building at 18th and Michigan; part of a Frank Lloyd Wright bootleg house at 44th and Greenwood Avenue; a piece of sculpture by Alfonso Ianelli . . . .*[23]

Nickel's progress in converting the building was cut short by his untimely death in 1972. He had not moved permanently into the building, but he had begun to furnish an apartment on the second floor and spent nights there when working late in the city.

After Nickel's death, the building was sold. The interior has been completely changed, but the exterior has remained much as it appeared in 1972. The building is color-coded "orange" in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey* for its overall architectural design and craftsmanship. As a reconnaissance-level architectural survey, the survey did not identify or take into account the building's association with Richard Nickel.

Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a recommendation for landmark designation of a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the proposed Richard Nickel Studio at 1810 W. Cortland St. be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criteria 1: Critical Part of the City's Heritage

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- 1810 W. Cortland Street is the only building Richard Nickel ever owned, and is the surviving building in Chicago with the strongest personal connection and association with Nickel, a significant figure in Chicago's architectural and cultural history for his involvement in the early preservation movement in Chicago.
- Through its association with Richard Nickel, the building is linked with the early development of the modern preservation movement in Chicago, a grass-roots movement which brought about greater public awareness and appreciation of the city's historic architecture.
- After purchasing the building in 1969, Richard Nickel used the building as a base for his architectural salvage work, storing tools and equipment for salvage work there and photographing and storing architectural fragments there, including pieces from the Chicago Stock Exchange and other important buildings.
- Richard Nickel owned the building at the time of his tragic and untimely death in 1972 in a partial collapse of the Chicago Stock Exchange building, an event that continues to have great resonance in the history of Chicago's historic preservation movement.

Criteria 3: Significant Person

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- Leading public demonstrations, orchestrating a letter-writing campaign, and engaging the media and the public, Richard Nickel played a significant role in the efforts in 1961 to save the Garrick Theater, an important event in the early historic preservation movement in Chicago. While ultimately unsuccessful, the tactics employed by Nickel mark the fight to save the Garrick as one of the first and most prominent grass-roots preservation efforts in Chicago.

- From 1961 to 1972, Nickel worked to raise public awareness and appreciation of Chicago's important historic architecture through such efforts as his advocacy to save threatened buildings and through his leadership and participation in organizations such as the Chicago Heritage Committee, the first preservation advocacy organization in Chicago, which he co-founded. Nickel salvaged a large and important collection of architectural ornament which remains today exhibited in museum and university collections throughout the United States. Nickel's photograph's from the 1950s to 1972 captured and recorded important Chicago buildings which have been demolished, and many have become iconic images of Chicago's historic architecture.

- The circumstances of his tragic death have lent Nickel an almost mythic status in the city's preservation movement, as his reputation and importance have continued to grow with the publication of Richard Cahan's biography *They All Fall Down*, the display of architectural ornament he salvaged, and as many of his photographs have become iconic images of the city's historic architecture.

Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Richard Nickel Studio retains its historic location and its neighborhood setting as well as the majority of its physical characteristics and design features from the time when it was owned by Richard Nickel, including its historic cast-iron street-level storefront with its large display windows. Above the first floor, the brick and limestone wall materials, window openings, and the ornamental pressed-metal cornice have also been retained. These features are original to the building.

Visible changes to the building's front elevation since Nickel owned it include the replacement of the two historic entrance doors and the replacement of the historic windows on the second floor. The front elevation had been painted prior to Nickel purchasing the building, and at some

point after 1972 this elevation was sandblasted to remove the paint. Despite these changes, the building retains sufficient physical integrity from the period of significance to convey its historic association with Richard Nickel.

At the time of this report, the building is undergoing renovation to connect it to an adjacent single-family home at 1808 W. Cortland Street in order to expand the home's living areas. Pursuant to the Commission's review and approval, the rear 26 feet of the building have been demolished and the front elevation is being restored.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Richard Nickel Studio, the Commission recommends that the significant historical and architectural features be identified as:

(a) For purposes of Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the **significant historical and architectural features** of the building are identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building visible from public rights-of-way.

(b) For purposes of Section 2-120-825 of the Municipal Code specifically and only governing permits for demolition, the **significant historical and architectural features** of the building are identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, for a depth of forty (40) feet as measured from the front elevation.
  Pursuant to the above, the rear approximately 26 feet of the original building, now demolished except for a remaining portion of the basement and the west wall, would be specifically and purposefully excluded.

NOTES

[1] From his college years until his death (1953-1972), Nickel's primary residence was his parents' home in suburban Park Ridge where he had a living space in the attic and a basement photo studio. The garage and lawn of the suburban home were used to store architectural ornament which Nickel salvaged. Nickel also stored ornament in other locations, including Navy Pier. With the exception of the Glessner House, the majority of the major buildings in Chicago with which Nickel had any association were demolished. The Chicago Stock Exchange arch and trading room interior were reconstructed at the Art Institute of Chicago.

[2] In the three decades between Sullivan's death in 1924 and the Institute of Design exhibit in 1954, Adler and Sullivan received scant attention from the public or academics. The exceptions were Hugh Morrison's *Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture* published in 1935, and Frank Lloyd Wright's *Genius and Mobocracy* from 1949.

[3] The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, precursor to the current Commission on Chicago Landmarks, was created by passage of the city's first landmark ordinance in 1957. As per the *Historical and Architectural Landmark Designations in Chicago: Preliminary Information*, a document prepared to guide this first commission, the body was charged with the "preparation of criteria for selection of the landmarks, marking the landmarks, preparation of a policy for a permanent organization for architectural preservation, and with education of the public to stimulate popular interest in architectural preservation." The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks held a plaque ceremony for owners of the 39 buildings designated as landmarks in February 1960, one month after Balaban and Katz announced their plans to demolish the Garrick. Representatives from Balaban and Katz did not attend.

[4] Theodore Hild, "The Chicago Heritage Committee and the New Preservation" *Journal of Illinois History* 4 (Autumn 2001): 178-192.

[5] Duncan, Hugh D. "Chicago architecture." *Inland Architect* 13 (June 1969).

[6] The primary source accounts of the Garrick fight such as articles in *Time* and *Harper's* magazines and a 1969 interview of Nickel in the *Inland Architect* all characterize Nickel as the leader of a new kind of preservation battle based on grass-roots activism. Ted Hild's and Daniel Bluestone's later histories of the historic preservation movement in Chicago support this assessment of Nickel and the importance of the Garrick fight. Hild described the Garrick fight as a "precedent-setting effort" which involved "wide citizen participation" and which "was not only the first of its kink for historic preservation in the city but also marked the beginning of the modern preservation movement in Chicago."

[7] The committee determined that it would not be economically feasible for the City of Chicago to purchase the Garrick.

[8] "As a result of a feverish crusade started by a 32-year-old architectural photographer named Richard Nickel, the case of the Garrick went before Cook County Superior Court." *Time,* September 5, 1960 "Art: the Landmark and the Law."

[9] The idea for the city to government to sponsor architectural salvage first occurred in 1960 while the Garrick was under appeal. The Chicago Community Conservation Board convinced Mayor Richard J. Daley to salvage ornament from the Cable Building, and Nickel supervised this project. Nickel had previously started salvaging ornament on his own during the demolition of the Louis Sullivan-designed Babson House, which was demolished in 1960.

[10] Contributions came from the City of Chicago, Balaban and Katz, the Society of Architectural Historians, the American Institute of Architects, World Book Encyclopedia, and individuals.

[11] Ornamental terra-cotta, floor mosaics, portions of stenciled walls.

[12] The Art Institute of Chicago was given first choice from the collection, but it took relatively little. The largest number of pieces went to the architecture schools at Yale and Harvard universities. Other recipients included the Georgia Institute of Technology, Smith College, the Dallas Museum of Contemporary Art, the Missouri Historical Society, and several other state universities, as well as a university in Milan, Italy. The section of the Garrick's loggia currently located at Second City on Wells Street came from a separate collection gathered by the demolition contractor.

[13] Richard Nickel, letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1960.

[14] Richard Nickel, *Inland Architect* 13 (June 1969).

[15] Richard Nickel, letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1960.
[16] Richard Nickel, *Inland Architect* 13 (June 1969).
[17] Samuelson.
[18] Richard Nickel, *Inland Architect* 13 (June 1969).
[19] The vote was 7-2. Karin Langer's Master's thesis from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago documenting the early years of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks noted that the Commission's recommendation anticipated "that if the building fell to redevelopment, every effort should be made to completely document it through drafting plans, completing research data, and taking photographs."
[20] Commission Minutes.
[21] The trading room was reconstructed in its entirety inside the Art Institute of Chicago; the entrance arch was re-erected just outside the Columbus Drive elevation of the Art Institute of Chicago.
[22] "he [Nickel] worked as a 'lackey,' building the new wall with Vinci's brothers, who were masonry contractors." Cahan, They All Fall Down, p. 205.
[23] Samuelson.

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Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning, Historic Preservation Division: p. 2.

Historic American Buildings Survey HABS ILL, 16-CHIG, 60-6, Copy of Garrick Theater photograph published in the *American Architect and Building News*, January 9, 1897: p. 5, top left.

Historic American Buildings Survey HABS ILL, 16-CHIG, 60-2, Richard Nickel, photographer, 1961, detail of Garrick Theater ornament on the vault, interior wall of the orchestra floor, and forward edge of the balcony: p. 5, top right.

Historic American Buildings Survey HABS ILL, 16-CHIG, 60-1, Richard Nickel, photographer, 1961, Garrick Theater exterior top story detail: p. 5, lower left.

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Historic American Buildings Survey HABS ILL, 16-CHIG, 9-1, Richard Nickel, photographer November-December 1960, Republic Building, State Street Entrance: p. 8, lower right.

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Richard Nickel, postcard to Tim Samuelson, March 1969: p. 16, top.

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